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Syntactic Reconstruction

Virtually any aspect of syntax can change over time: basic word-order patterns, serial verb constructions, markers of subordination, the role of inflectional morphology, infinitive constructions, and relativization strategies—all are typical areas for the operation of syntactic *change*. This can be investigated in various ways: we may observe earlier and later stages of a language (if suitable data are at hand), and map the changes from one stage to another; or we may undertake reconstruction. Syntactic reconstruction aims at the establishment of syntactic patterns and constructions in an unattested language. If evidence from only one language is used, the procedure employed is I[nternal] R[econstruction]. If evidence from a number of related languages is used, the procedure followed is that of C[omparative] R[econstruction]. IR in syntax is similar to IR in phonology, in that it posits temporally antecedent or underlying forms on the basis of synchronic variation.

Within its limitations, the applicability of IR to syntax has not been questioned. That of CR, however, has been subjected to serious questioning, primarily because of the apparent differences between the application of CR to phonology and to syntax. In the reconstruction of phonology, potentially cognate forms from related languages are assembled; regular phonetic correspondences are determined; and phonetic values are assigned to these correspondences. The assignment of phonetic values to correspondences is implicitly based on *typology*, and on the assumed naturalness of phonetic change. The comparability of the potential cognates is ensured by their semantic equivalence, or by reconcilable divergences. Both the semantic and the formal sides of the equation must be met in order for the comparative method to be valid. Under these conditions, CR has great predictive power: sound change is regular, and if new examples of the same reconstructed segment in the same environment are found, they will undergo the same changes. But syntactic change is not regular in the same way, and the applicability of CR to syntax is not universally accepted.

Objections to CR arise because an immediate one-to-one comparison cannot usually be made between different sentences in different languages. Since there are no cognate sentences, and since the comparative method relies crucially on the semantic identity of the elements compared, a number of scholars have not accepted the extension of CR to syntax; they argue that the matching across languages of mere syntactic patterns has no probative value (Lightfoot 1979:154ff. and Winter 1984, from very different perspectives). Another objection asserts that since there are no proto-texts, there can be no proto-syntax; hence all that can be done is to trace developments between two attested stages of a language (cf. Lightfoot 1979).

This flat rejection of the possibility of CR in syntax is countered by some of its obvious successes. For example, one feature of I[ndo-]E[uropean] word order has been accepted by all investigators. The rule, known as Wackernagel's Law, states that enclitic pronouns and certain particles occupy the second position in the clause, after the first accented element. Jacob Wackernagel's primary evidence came from Vedic Sanskrit and Homeric Greek, where this placement of enclitics and other postpositive elements is regular; his secondary evidence came from archaic Latin, and from the rather different systems of Old Slavic and Old Irish. In 1892, when Wackernagel posited his rule, Hittite had not yet been discovered; thus the fact that Hittite observes this rule more rigidly than any other older IE language is striking confirmation of the principles of CR as applied to syntax. Wackernagel's Law is a good example of the agreement of a number of languages on an arbitrary point of syntax; it has parallels

elsewhere, for example, in certain Uto-Aztecan languages (Luiseño, Cahuilla, Huichol, etc.).

The comparative method can also be applied to poetic formulas and themes. Within a language family such as IE, there exists a substantial body of archaic poetic texts, composed in a highly conservative oral tradition. Some of the formulas and themes found in these texts are identical across a number of languages. These reconstructible poetic phrases preserve bits of the syntax of the proto-language, while the themes guarantee similar, if not identical, contexts—thus fulfilling the semantic criterion for the comparative equation (see Watkins 1976, 1987).

Another syntactic reconstructional technique is the projection of a synchronic state back to the proto-language. This was, in essence, the procedure of Delbrück 1878 in determining IE word order on the basis of that of Vedic Sanskrit prose. Later, Meillet 1937:365 ff. argued that Homeric Greek best preserved the IE practice of placing the most important lexical item first in the clause. Both approaches implicitly assume that data from other related languages will be reconcilable with the syntactic constructions projected back to the proto-language, and that there is a clear directionality of change.

Syntactic typology has also been employed as a reconstructional technique. Lehmann 1974, Friedrich 1974, and Hawkins 1983 have, in varied ways, used a typological approach to reconstructing syntax. Of the typological universals proposed by Greenberg 1966, a number "cluster" in a particularly coherent manner and thereby enable scholars to seek positive characterizations of different word-order types. For instance, languages with a basic S[ubject] O[bject] V[erb] word order typically have relative clauses preposed to their head nouns, use postpositions rather than prepositions, and show the order main verb + auxiliary; but SVO languages usually have the reverse of these patterns. Lehmann in particular has used such features in a highly predictive manner, to establish the directionality of syntactic change and the types of patterns to be reconstructed for Proto-IE. Friedrich, by contrast, has used the same typological criteria, in conjunction with a statistical sampling of short texts in older IE languages, in an attempt to argue that the word order of Proto-IE was VO rather than Lehmann's OV. Both approaches are open to criticism. Lehmann believes that "ideal" OV and VO types exist, and insists that any deviation from these ideal types indicates that change is in progress. Friedrich establishes basic word-order types simply by counting features in a sample of languages and then chooses the reconstruction that reflects the pattern of the majority; such a procedure ignores recessive or variant orders, which are crucial for reconstruction. Hawkins 1983 seeks to formulate exceptionless word-order universals, based in part on Theo Vennemann's work (see Vennemann 1984 for a reaction). To convert Greenberg's single-valued probabilistic universals into exceptionless universals, Hawkins combines them into multi-valued implicational statements. These exceptionless statements are then used in an attempt to reconstruct IE word order. Once again, reconstruction is performed on the basis of majority patterns. More important, the linking of statistical universals to establish exceptionless universals involves a loss of information about variant ("non-dominant") orders at each stage, and often these variants can be used to determine the direction of change. A more nuanced approach to variation is provided by Kroch and Taylor 2000, who carry out statistical analyses of OV and VO word order patterns in a large Early Middle English corpus, and on this basis argue for the coexistence of competing underlying grammars, thus establishing continuity with earlier stages of English.

The typological approach has been severely criticized by Watkins 1976, Lightfoot 1979, and Winter 1984, among others. It obviously cannot serve as the sole reconstructional technique; however, as in phonology, it can be a guide for reconstruction.

The crucial issue in syntactic reconstruction is the determination of the directionality of change. Campbell and Mithun 1980:37 have argued that "the comparative method applied directly to syntax is largely unproductive because there is no analogue to the regularity and directionality of phonological change." Harris and Campbell 1995:ch. 12, however, presents a number of examples of syntactic reconstruction from language families with complex morphological systems; here, the reconstructibility of the morphology leads to conclusions about the proto-syntax, and it is often possible to establish directionality: thus, when daughter languages variously have SOV, SVO, and VSO word order, the direction of change can usually be determined, since changes from SOV to SVO are far more numerous and better documented than those from SVO to SOV. Again, it is usually possible to establish a unidirectional pattern of development in the shift from postposition to preposition: enclitic postpositions will not shift to prepositions, nor will proclitic prepositions shift to postpositions. (For an example of the development of postpositions from a prepositional system, see Greenberg 1980.) Hoenigswald 1980 has emphasized the role that stress may play in word order—

especially with regard to the position of the verb, and to anaphora or cataphora. All these factors must be taken into account for reconstruction. The more inclusive our approach, the more likely we are to obtain valid results.

[*See also* Comparative Method; Historical Linguistics; Language Change.]

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Stylistic Reconstruction

In the study of style and poetic language (German *Dichtersprache*)—of "what makes a verbal message a work of art" (Jakobson 1987:63)—the diachronic and genetic component is the special concern of comparative poetics. The focus of this sample treatment will be on the older I[ndo-] E[uropean] languages, with rich and extensive literatures from cultures of different levels ranging widely in time and space. (For general reference, see Wackernagel 1968; Schmitt 1967, 1968; Campanile 1977; and Watkins 1995.)

In such a well-studied language family, the product of comparative poetics is the reconstruction of features of style as well as facts of grammar; the principles are the same. The model for comparative/historical linguistics is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. *Reconstruction of a Language*